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## ABSTRACT

This study examined students perceptions of campus racial climate and the effects it has on their growth and development while attending a predominantly white research university (Research 1 classification) where black students are less than 3% of the student body. The study sought to illuminate the perceptions of campus climate and development as experienced by black and white students. Data were collected from four focus groups of black students, two of student athletes, one group of students from the recreational sports facility, and one from the multicultural services center, and from white students from various locations on campus. In all, 51 students participated in the focus groups. Findings show that students had chosen the university for various reasons, with black students more inclined to choose the university based on financial aid packages, and white students more likely to have relied on legacy and word of mouth. Students expressed the belief that a critical mass of minority students was necessary for development and change, and that this was lacking at the university. Personal and mentoring relationships were considered important for student growth and development, and black students perceived these as more important than did white students. The other education for black students included life lessons that they thought white students did not encounter, including survival skills needed for the white world. The study also suggests that the university's traditions are not inclusive of marginalized groups, and that black students experience overt and covert racism frequently. (Contains 19 references.) (SLD)

**UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT OF THE "OTHER" EDUCATION: BLACK AND WHITE STUDENTS  
TALK ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES AT LONE STAR UNIVERSITY, A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE  
INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE SOUTH**

**Paper presented at the 2002 Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This study examined students' perceptions of campus racial climate and the effects that it had on their growth and development while attending a predominantly white research one institution. The study sought to illuminate the perceptions of campus climate and development as experienced by Black and White students that attend Lone Star University.

## **THEORETICAL FRAME**

It has been well documented that campus culture, ethos and environment play significant roles in influencing the social and psychosocial development of students of color while in college (Astin, 1984; Watson & Kuh 1996; Tierney, 1996; Hurtado, 1996 & 1998, Kuh, 1993). Black students in particular that attend public predominantly white institutions of higher education undergo significant frustrations while in college. Although Recruitment and retention are typically thought to be the obvious cause and effect variables, it appears that social development after recruiting students is a larger vehicle of distress (Powell, 1998). In fact, black students social development is critically connected to their perceptions of the social and academic environment on campus. Therefore, it becomes difficult to recruit and retain students of color if their perception of the social and academic environment on campus drives them away (Powell, 1998). Examining how students perceive institutional climate and its effects on their change and development while in college may provide some understanding to the ambiguities involved in the socializing processes encountered by minority students (Hurtado 1996).

It is particularly important for institutions of higher education to understand the properties of racial climate. They are complex, and are shaped by external and internal racial forces in higher education (Hurtado, 1998). External racial elements are described as the impact of government policy, programs, initiatives and the impact of socio-historical forces that can influence the campus racial climate. Internal elements that affect racial climate are described as an institution's historical legacy of inclusion or exclusion of various racial/ethnic groups, its physical numerical diversity in terms of demographic make-up, psychological climate among groups, and the intergroup relations on campus (Hurtado, 1998, 1996). Consequently, the university administration should be concerned with how they implement strategies that not only enhance minority student cognitive development, but more importantly how they may unknowingly provide and sustain unrecognized benefits to certain groups and cultures through traditions, values, linguistic styles inherent of the traditional white students that attend the university (Tinto, 1993; Wright, 1987; ). Therefore, although a campus environment may be perceived as enriching for many students, it can vary by one's institutional affiliation as well as ethnic composition.

This research paper examines students' perceptions of their development, change and growth while attending a public predominantly white university. The importance of internal and external elements of racial climate and how campus climate affects their personal development is also noted. In particular, climate elements that students perceive to be critical to their growth and development, such as administrative support, influences from administration, caring, and peer and mentor will be reported. Additionally, the issue of how public white Institutions respond to the needs of Black and White students is also explored.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

Qualitative inquiry was used primarily because of its ability to convey subtle environmental and contextual nuances, in addition to student voices that have typically been ignored or missing in other forms of inquiry; secondly, the rich contextual data elicited from participants while addressing sensitive issues could best be interpreted through the constructivist lens. Additionally, thick descriptions provided a crucial vehicle to enhance the narrative on the climate of the university and the development of the students. For instance, in order to illustrate the frequent reference to the Confederate flag, and the students description of what they termed a 'strict conservative' nature of the institution, a brief historical account of the university's military history and general campus demographics became a critical part of the story.

### *Data Sources*

This study was conducted at a large public white institution in the South. Black students comprise less than 3% (Office of Institutional Studies and Planning, 1998) of the total population of undergraduate students at Lone Star University (pseudonym); therefore, collecting data from this population took strategic planning. Multiple administrative offices, dorms, and students were targeted for initial contacts.

The population included four focus groups selected from Black students, two from the athletics department, one group of students from recreational sports facility and one from multicultural services. In addition, White students were readily selected from multiple sources throughout the campus. Each focus group included six to eight participants for a total of fifty-one students. During the summer of 2000, data from the participants was gathered through the use of a questionnaire designed to collect information on the following: (1) Black and White students perception of the campus climate and how it effects them while in college; (2) who or what facilitates students' growth and development; (3) personal attributes or institutional obstacles that might impede growth or encourage them toward personal success.

### *Data Analysis*

All data were transcribed by the researcher immediately following the interviews. The transcripts were analyzed by the researcher using the constant comparative method as described in Glaser and Strauss (1967), and later refined by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Categories were analyzed perpetually in order to interpret the data truthfully and to preserve the meaning and context of the participants and environment. Through the constant comparative method, in addition to categorizing and unitizing the information, the researcher attempted to "make sense" out of the data. This process compared the data to existing research on campus racial climate with the students' responses.

## **FINDINGS**

Five major themes emerged from the data. The themes were; college choice, racism and critical mass, the other education, the ring and agents of change. The study will begin with a brief look at why students choose Lone Star University. Accordingly, a brief discussion on the influences of racism and critical mass will follow. The next section addresses traditions, legacy, and how the Corps of Cadets and other military aspects influence the perception of the "other" education on campus followed by a brief discussion of the Lone Star Ring. The final segment addresses student change, specifically the question of who students believe is responsible for their change while in college.

During the course of the interviews, it became clear that Black and White students' experiences that occurred both in and out of the classroom at the University were very different. In order to provide a more provocative contrast between the two groups of students, this researcher chose to display the results in such a way that the reader could readily identify the experiences of each of the two groups. Therefore, noting who the respondents are is highlighted by student response headers. For instance, the header "Black Student Responses" should prompt the reader that the data and results were gathered from Black students. The same format is used for White student responses. Additionally, there are instances where both Black and White students' responses are similar. In those cases, the header reads "Student Responses" or a short explanation follows in the text to allow for an easy read.

Accordingly, we began the journey by asking students why they chose the university and about activities and learning that occur outside of the classroom.

### **Why Lone Star?**

#### *White student Responses*

All of the White students interviewed in this study expressed a genuine love for the University and a reciprocity that had been equally conveyed to them by the university. When participants were asked why they chose the university, they often replied that there was an overwhelming sense of hospitality and warmth offered to them upon the initial visit to the university. However, campus visits, Petersons guides, World Report

Rankings, and endowments are typically not a determining factor for any of the students that I interviewed. White students at Lone Star typically do not choose Lone Star by sitting in or visiting classes, asking questions about the curriculum, or researching the university before attending. Instead, the students unequivocally chose Lone Star university because of legacy, tradition, and the age-old art of persuasion and suggestion by parents and other former students. Several students noted that they came from a long line of Farmers—grandparents, parents and other relatives. And other reported that they had dreamed of becoming Farmers since birth. The following responses illustrate how White students choose Lone Star University:

My father went to Lone Star

All of my relatives graduated from Lone Star

My uncles went to school here and they have a lot of traditions that I like and want to become a part of.

Lone Star's traditions captivate many students. However, White students suggested that another redeeming quality of the university was the pervasive atmosphere of conservatism embedded within the institutional structure. Although research steadily supports the conclusion that high involvement in service activities should lead to a more liberal campus environment (Astin, 1977) and college attendance is associated with increases in academic knowledge, liberalism, tolerance for ambiguity and relativity, and decreases in authoritarianism, dogmatism, and stereotypic approaches (Strange & King 1981, p. 293). Students did not expect nor want this from Lone Star.

Not only were they drawn to the myth that the campus was indeed conservative, they informed me that their parents viewed it as a selling point. This atmosphere of conservatism was endorsed and marketed by parents, former students and the school counselors. Parents could be assured that their students would be protected from "outsiders" of Lone Star and above all, they would be safe from the people with purple hair that attended the university "up the street".

Despite the research that states that students are more tolerant of others, less dogmatic and more liberal with high involvement of undergraduates in service activities, the campus supports and engenders an atmosphere that is conservative politically, socially, racially, and religiously. During one interview a group of students spoke about the conservative environment on campus—a conversation that provided on some levels a light-hearted conversation that touched upon the atmosphere of homogeneity, as the following students comments suggest:

I think that it's great that it's a conservative town—that's what it's known for—but it really needs to emphasize other things more.... It just it is too ... close-minded and ... it's not a real world situation.... I have a friend that goes to UCLA.... I was talking to him about Lone Star... and I was like, oh yeah, there's hardly any minorities and ... I stated what it was like to go here ... usually every-one looks a lot alike.... I mean everyone looks alike on this campus. We all go The GAP. We all go to Old Navy. We all go to the same mall.

Although the student's comments were made in jest, and provided a hardy round of laughter during the focus group interview, the student's conversation suggested something less sedate and rather bleak. And that message is, despite the overwhelming research that claims a critical mass of other ethnicities and cultures provides a paramount experience necessary for the social integration of minority students, or the fact that heterogeneous student populations are important for both minority and majority students' socializing experiences, according to this students comments, homogenous student populations on this campus are typical and expected even though they may not be in the "real word".



On another note, one White student, although only one during the focus groups recognized that they, Lone Star students, needed to become more tolerant or exposed to other races and cultures. This same student acknowledged that they might be missing a multicultural experience that is greatly needed for the future. The student suggested that "the university needed to work on integrating things more" and that this lack of integration was very noticeable when he traveled to institutions in other parts of the state where campuses were more "meshed", and that this campus in general, was not "very cohesive", but divisive. The following student's comments illustrate this point:

I go to San Antonio now. There's more Hispanic than White and I'm totally unprepared ... unprepared for what I notice ... when I come here you kind of live a ... we do live a sheltered life. It's a misrepresentation of [life].... It goes back to the college preparing you for life and that kind of thing. And because of diversity—lack of diversity—we are not being prepared in that way. And I think a lot of people are not sensitive and will not be sensitive when they go into the work place to deal with working along side minorities. It doesn't frighten me, but I think on this campus it frightens some people.

Unfortunately, this students sentiments were not widespread during the focus group meetings. In fact, very few White students mentioned diversity or the lack of diversity as reasons for not attending the university. In fact, homogeneity, and conservatism coupled with legacy and tradition of attending Lone Star, were admirable characteristics of the university. The typical student is satisfied with secondhand knowledge that the university is good or someone's perception of good. As one student put it:

Not knowing much about Lone Star, knowing that it is a very big school and a very good school, that is all I know.

For the most part, white students were equipped and satisfied with secondhand knowledge of the university but paradoxically did not know much about the university at all. However, this student, like the majority of students interviewed, will more than likely find a comfortable fit into the atmosphere of conservatism, tradition, and perception of safety that the institution seems to offer its students. This homogeneous perception discourages diversity and is further perpetuated through a common language of slang used to describe the many folks who do not fit comfortably into the environment. For instance, students who express the remote possibility they may not be entirely happy in University City are invited to travel in either direction of Highway 6 in order to alleviate the drudgery—the highway runs both ways and they can leave as easily as they came. In addition, those students who are ordained "eggheads," or who simply do not attend all sporting events, or are not deemed to be true Farmers are characterized with numeric parameters to display their lack of participation in Farmer-life: they are now "two percenters." The only hope for these students is to, as Farmers see it, conform.

*Black student responses.* Black students choose Lone Star for very different reasons than White students. The majority of Black students expressed discomfort and possible tension during the initial arrival to the university. Many of the Black students suggested that the main reason for choosing A&M was for the generous financial aid packages. It was not uncommon for students to reply that they came to A&M for the money or scholarship. However after they arrived they were shocked by the small number of Black students on campus.

Another more disparaging response was that, Black students explained that they had been tricked during the recruitment process. They describe a recruitment procedure that involves having students of color visit the university during a conferences that attracts students of color throughout the state of Texas to the Lone Star campus. During this time students are lead to believe that the demographic make-up of the campus during those three days reflects the true ethnic composition of the university. Although the university lists the ethnic composition of the student population in several places, students are blind-sighted by what they experience during the weekend visit. As one student put it:

"They invited me to attend the university or come for a visit during SBLA (Southern Black Leadership Conference is a conference hosted annually by the university). All I saw was the Black people. I was tricked. "

When I arrived, there were only two to three Black people in my classes. I knew Lone Star was White, but it did not know that it was this White.... I just wanted to go home [after arriving at Lone Star].

I called my mother and explained how everyone is white here and I wanted to come home.

Paradoxically, students were told of the demographics of the university or the city before they arrived. Black students sentiments were warned by their parents of the potential danger and pervasive intolerance historically affiliated with the University and the city of University City. The following commentary provides an example of how parents equipped their students before leaving for college:

I came from a Black neighborhood. I went to a Black school. I was told to watch out before I arrived at Lone Star.... My parents told me to watch out.

Lone Star operates as if in a historical time warp.

The Black students, in conjunction with their parents still chose Lone Star. They believed that the experiences gained through interactions with White People would be valuable and not readily available from other institutions. In contrast, White students often referred to one of the most redeeming qualities of the university was that it provided them protection from the outside world where they could be "coddled and protected", and that there was a tight fit between what they expected from the university in terms of student population and what they actually received. Their conversations with parents, and relatives who were former students had prompted them to consider Lone Star and assured them that the university would act as sort of a parent while they attended the institution. Contrastingly, Black students conversations with their parents included a dialogue on the societal problems that most people would believe to have been circumvented through Civil Rights legislation of 1964, however, many Black parents told their students that, "They [Lone Star and all affiliated with the school] were back in time.... My parents warned me about White people and University City.... My dad's uncle was killed by the KKK.

### **Racism 101 and Critical Mass**

I asked Black students if they really worried about things like the KKK? They responded that :

"There are just too few black people on this campus" and that they believed that if more people that looked like them would attend school at Lone Star, this might make a difference in the manner in which they were treated. Black students often eluded to a critical mass of their representation on the campus as a necessary piece to their social and academic success. It has been well documented that a direct result of critical mass is that groups are more tolerant and perhaps less hostile to those who are different. Students are more likely to learn about other groups if they are prevalent on the campus and at the same time are more likely to harbor prejudicial feelings if they are ignorant of diverse groupings.

Black Students spoke of this ignorance frequently. They reported that it was typical to experience racism and intolerance in Stanley-University City daily in the city or on campus. Frequently Black students reported that the Confederate flag "plastered" across campus and waved in front of the MSC was an overt form of racism, and that it was shocking when they first arrived. However, they were so used to it, on t-shirts, hair bows, windows, cars and trucks and that its effect had almost become innocuous. Some claimed that it had made them complacent in their battle against racism. One student stated that she "had to choose her battles"

and this one she was not going to fight. However, most students reported more flagrant forms of racism and incidents. When asked whether the incidents were isolated events or whether they occurred by happenstance, several students reported that they dealt with some form of overt or covert racial incidence on a daily or weekly basis.

During several sessions, Black students also spoke of the perceived prejudice experience in the Stanley-University City where merchants reportedly routinely followed Blacks around the stores and refused to wait on them. Several students noted that the apartment complexes also practiced a strange ritual of housing Blacks in the back of the apartment complex. One student in particular informed the researcher that it was well known by Black students throughout the campus that this particular complex routinely practiced this procedure in order to hide its Black residents from potential White residents.

One Black student concluded that:

We live in two worlds here. The White world and the Black world. And we have to change to accommodate those worlds. My speech even changes.

Several students commented that one needs only to visit the campus once to experience the pervasive racial or ethnic bifurcation prevalent throughout the Lone Star campus. Students suggested that the University sends out subliminal messages to students of color through geographical locations of the administrative offices that serves primarily, Black and Hispanic students. However, both Black and White were disturbed by the location of the Multicultural student services office. As this quote reflects:

They house multicultural services in the basement. That is strategic.... What kind of subliminal message are they sending?

Why is it not located somewhere else on campus? Why does it have to be in the basement?

One student provided the following sophisticated observation and commentary:

There are few Black and Hispanic professionals on the Lone Star campus ... but most of the custodians are either Black or Hispanic. Why?

In fact, the students' observations were astute. According to the Office of Institutional Studies and Planning (1998), there were 6 Executive Administrative positions filled by Blacks or 1.91% of the total 311 potential positions. However, service and maintenance positions are routinely occupied by Blacks and Hispanics (over 70%). Contrastingly, only 27% of those service maintenance positions were filled with White employees. This figure becomes more interesting in light of the fact that the total number of White staff employees far exceeds that of either Blacks or Hispanics. In fact, Whites comprise 70% of the total staff employed by the university. And even more surprisingly, out of a total of 782 Blacks employed at the Lone Star campus, 65% are relegated to service and maintenance positions, yet they account for only 1.91% of the executive administrative staff (Office of Institutional Studies and Planning, 1998). In contrast, of 3,409 Whites employed in non-faculty positions, only 8.8% are employed as service maintenance staff.

Interestingly enough, the demographic make-up of Stanley-University City suggests that Blacks are disproportionately employed in non-professional positions by the University. According to the Census Bureau figures for 1999, Blacks and Hispanics comprise 30% of the total 134,213 population reported to inhabit the cities of Stanley University City. Black citizens constitute 16,418 of the population and Hispanics 23,840. And of that 134,213 approximately 45,000 are white students. Therefore, the figures become even more scathing, with Blacks and Hispanics representing almost fifty percent of the population of the cities.

**The other education**



### *White Student Responses*

White students typically referred to the "other education" as being an essential part of the curriculum. The new campus environment attempts to embrace this pedagogy through student involvement on campus. Students are able to delve into multiple aspects of the "other education," through student social organizations such as fraternities and sororities in addition to organizations that specifically operate in the capacity of service.

The prestige of the graduate program coupled with a wide selection of student programs to choose from may serve as an explanation of why students are bitterly opposed to the idea that the purpose of this university is primarily research, or as a haven for academics engaged in knowledge production. The following student expresses his frustration at the idea of the institution only serving as an educational facility:

They're not well-rounded people that know how to interact with other people.

Probably the least amount of education I have received is actually from the classroom—it sounds bad but I have learned a lot of things that will help me in the real world through extracurricular activities.

Unlike the students that Horowitz (1988) describes, the students at Lone Star speak of knowledge gained through experience rather than that gained through intellectual gymnastics in the classroom. They speak of friendship, "getting a life," and "getting the whole life experience".

A belief in academics is prominent in students' claims that they choose to attend the university for reasons of prestige, academic preparation, and other scholarly endeavors. However, the students' voices resonate with overwhelming agreement that they receive "more" from Lone Star than just the knowledge one acquires from the formal classroom and books. Several students commented that Lone Star provided them with "more" than other equally prestigious universities could offer:

I visited a lot of campuses that have the educational prestige, I guess, that I felt Lone Star had to offer me, but I felt that this campus was a lot friendlier.

I actually went to Baylor for a semester before I came to Lone Star.... It's a lot more relaxed than Baylor was ... and a lot more friendly also ... I just like the people here a lot better.

They believe there is more to education than just the classroom and expect to derive other lessons from the extra-class context. This notion of the well-rounded student and the "other education" are recurring themes in the lives of students. During one interview with several freshman, a student candidly commented that, the "other stuff," the lessons learned outside of the classroom are just as important as "the stuff" that you don't really need to know, lessons learned in the classroom:

But I guess in my own head I was expecting to learn how to be on my own and how to deal with situations and also gain knowledge at the same time—become more knowledgeable.... I realized once I got here that you have to learn all this other stuff that you don't even need to know ... but, you learn also a lot of other good stuff from the 'other' education and just being on your own.

What it comes down for me is that the university tries to enable us to have a very well rounded education ... including either extra activities and not just ... the classes and everything.

The following student speaks of involvement encompassing different aspects of the university life and finding that special "fit" into the campus environment:

### *Black Student Responses*

Black students also stressed the importance of "the other education"; however, the other education was viewed from another context. In fact, the majority of Black students claimed that the university does not provide sufficient outlets for social integration for any minority student. Most Black students explained that they would like to become involved in other activities on campus but for the most part student activities do not include activities for students of color. In addition, they do not feel welcomed at some of the major socializing events or the 700 activities that are supposed to be open to all students on campus.

Students claim that the traditions here do not cater to Blacks. During one visit to the Office of Multicultural Services, several students agreed that, "Although the University claims to support diversity and multiculturalism, they continue to endorse programming that traditionally segregates the student body."

Some Black students did reply that if they had to do it all over again, they would become involved in student activities on the campus. However, after three to five years, they remained hesitant in the decision.

While White students referred to "the other education" as lessons learned outside of the classrooms, or the vast array of student activities offered by the university, Black students, on the other hand, typically described "the other education" in terms of institutional goals or values they needed to learn to be successful working or socializing in the "White world." They learned how to strategize, how to play the game (in terms of race). They came here to learn how to better socialize with Whites.

During one interview a Black student explained that the university teaches one about life—life outside of the university—and that lesson is "that nobody [suggesting the University] cares about you" and that this lesson will help you once you leave.

We are burnt out once we leave here. We are not nurtured here; they [White students] are. I believe they (Blacks) get this at HBCU's. I wonder how they fare in the job market after leaving school?

The university has taught me about passive racism. I have learned how to play their game. They have taught me well. They have taught me to be Blacker. Right, they have taught us to be Blacker. We have gotten Blacker since we've been here.

### **The Ring as Indication of Part of the Group**

Pervasive throughout the interviews were comments referring to the acquisition of "The Ring". A pinnacle of an Farmer's accomplishments is that he or she will receive an Farmer Ring. The class ring at Lone Star probably means more than the class ring at other institutions. According to students, it means that you are now a part of an elite organization and family. As students enter the workforce, they believe that not only will their academic achievements reflect their abilities but the ring also brings to the table with them a sort of resume and privilege during the hiring process. White students typically conjured stories that reflected the mystique of the ring. As the following comments summarize:

My dad was like, you are out of there, with that ring and somebody is going to hire you.... He has heard stories from all over the world about that Farmer ring and what it can bring along.

It's like the whole Farmer ring thing—everybody recognizes that you're from Lone Star and you have a good education.

I can't wait until the day I can be called an "old Farmer" and have the Farmer ring. That's something I'm really looking forward to.

Black students also described acquiring the Farmer ring as an important piece to their academic careers. However, they cited different reasons for garnering the ring. Black students typically referred to the ring as their "calling card" that is needed to gain entrance into the Farmer employment network. But more importantly, students maintain that they are able to maneuver better and circumvent potential problems if they wear the ring. The following student describes the importance of wearing Farmer paraphernalia for public appearance:

Also you get treated differently if you attend this school or if they (White people) know that you attend this school. For instance, I went to the store in my home town and I wore a Farmer shirt. I was acknowledged and spoken to.... African-American students claimed that it was an absolute to purchase the ring.... I am treated differently [by White people] when I wear the Farmer Ring.... But back home nobody cares. My parents could not understand why it was that important [in comparison to cost they were expecting more]. They looked at it and said, "That's it?" I bought the ring to be able to maneuver easier in University City and (Texas).

According to the Black students, not only was the ring a necessary calling card for employment, but it also provided them with a sort of tangible safety net. As these students entered new situations and employment, they perceived that the ring provided them with some maneuverability that they would not experience without the ring. Students claim that they were less likely to be confronted by police in Stanley-University City, given more respect by local vendors and retailers, and most importantly shown respect that they otherwise would not be given without the ring. Interestingly, none of the Black students mentioned "fighting Farmer pride" or an undying love for Farmers as reasons for purchasing or wearing the ring.

### **Agents of Change**

Students typically leave home with great expectations for themselves—from parents, peers, and even from themselves. Included in those expectations is that of student change. Despite the pervasive conservative traditions of Lone Star University, students expect—and are expected—to change, not only academically but socially, emotionally, and developmentally. Several students suggested this notion and one student in particular poignantly clarified that:

I thought I would get independence from my family, but I thought I would only get book knowledge ... attend my classes and then leave, but I have learned much more than that.

Students often referred to the "learning much more than that" when referring to social and emotional developmental processes of change that they receive through various sources and resources on the University campus. For instance, students commented that the college experience in general "... is going to change you no matter what."

During several focus groups, students commented that the University will provide them with resources that they need in order to become successful socially and academically. In other words, the University sometimes acts as a direct socializing and developmental agent. However, when they were asked if they thought it was important for the University to try and change them, the answer was unequivocally and unanimously, "No." Instead, when they spoke of change agents, they specifically stated that peers, parents and professors to some extent were change agents.

### **Professors**

Students expressed certainty that to receive satisfactory grades and academic achievement, they must not only study, but gain some rapport with the professors in order to succeed while in college. This rapport is developed during their time at the university. Students need to satisfy superficial dichotomies (right and wrong, good paper/bad paper, good grade/bad grade) and certain traditional epistemologies learned in another contextual environment, namely high school, are questioned during their time at the University. The student is now cognizant of a bigger picture—a picture that includes a relationship with the instructor.

Students suggested that this unexpected rapport is developed throughout their academic careers. In addition, it is developed with the professor in conjunction with the University as described in the following commentary:

Six or eight professors that really have shown me that not only do they care about their class, but they care about their students, the rest of their lives, and their other classes.

When describing features that students think necessary for professors to be successful change agents in the developmental process, they typically outlined an education such as that offered by small private institutions or other liberal arts colleges. They want an intimate relationship with professors in terms of classroom teaching and advising, one-to-one individual attention, set office hours, and prompt responses to questions, whether in class or via e-mail. In addition, students speak of a *quid pro quo*. Students commented that

They [the faculty, teachers] kind of have to earn our respect in order for us to be open-minded and learn.

In essence, students believe that they are entitled to some tangible services for fees as evidenced by the following students comment:

I mean, we're paying for the education and the salaries.

These sentiments were typically espoused by lower division students. The majority of upper division students interviewed, however, spoke favorably of their relationships with professors. Generally these associations were reciprocally respectful. Often, students referred to the professors as "change agents" in the career of a college student. Not only do they speak of the resources they provide such as providing references for employment or graduate school, but several students commented on the relationships that they had developed with their professors.

You just get really close with your professors. You really need them when you get out, and need references, or go to graduate school.

Professors who have been helpful along the way in their academic careers were regularly commented upon. Their help was observed and appreciated. The characteristics of the individuals who helped in personal change processes were described and complimented. During several interviews, students commented that Dr. Jones was one of those professors that had been exceptional during their academic careers:

One of the professors that I just know ... I'd have to say is one the true mentors, as far as professors go at Lone Star, is Dr. Jones.... He is so inspirational.... He knows what kind of potential every single one of his students has.... It's not like he's telling us that we need to do this one. He leaves it up to you. There's just no other way around not wanting to better yourself after listening and talking to him.

Students also spoke of particular classes room environments that they believed evoked a nurturing environment. They felt as if these classrooms provided nurture both academically and socially. Several students explained that they believed that some professors really cared about what happened to them both in and out of the classroom. The following student explains how a class that he took during his first semester in college affected him:

I took the "Succeeding in College" class in my first semester, and I know it was probably like an "easy A" class, but I had a wonderful professor that really cared about us, and she genuinely was committed to

helping us not only in adjusting to the classroom but in the college experience. I think if more students had that, it would help.

Students were also very strident in their observation of professors that offered them more than lessons from the "book." They were encouraged when professors took the time out to learn their names and equally surprised when they were acknowledged outside of the classroom. One student was surprised to find out that not only did her professor remember her name, but that he had referred her name to a company spokesperson in search of new recruits based on her classroom capabilities and performance. They spoke of the utility of class. It was important to take the classes that would help them in the future but also classes that would allow them to gain access to resources on campus. Several Students commented on the Study Skills course offered by the Center for Academic Enhancement.

It wasn't just basically a class that you were in ... it was a class where your work was, to go out and find a resource that you could use on campus for this or for that. I think that was a big help; I think more advertisement for that class would be a good thing.

Astin (1984) encourages educators to focus less on what they do and more on what the student does or wants. And what students wanted included engagement in the classroom. Students often expressed their frustrations with boredom in classroom settings. They agreed that one of the qualities that they desired from professors included the ability for them to "make them cry"—which meant to the students engaging them by taking advantage in frequent teachable moments.

Faculty clearly have some impact on most students; however, as evidenced by substantial student commentary, their role has been minimal as agents of change for Black students. When Black students were asked whether professors on the Lone Star campus had helped them to change or grow, the answer was a resounding "No." Students looked upward and to the left to try and recall "anyone on the campus that had helped them or mentored them while in college."

After several attempts at trying to think of a professor that had served as a mentor or even a resource, one Black student replied that although he was in the Engineering Department, the professor that had been most helpful to him was a Black professor in the English department. After speaking with the student for several minutes, what came out was that the student had heard him (the professor) speak on several occasions and enjoyed his lectures. However, he had never spoken with nor did he know him personally.

Two Black females noted that the only professors or administrators that had been beneficial or instrumental during their college careers were Black and that they could call on them at anytime. One student even referred to a Black professor as being her "other mother."

The Black students felt that if the University really cared about them, then some services, administrators, and professors should be employed that would be able to address their needs. They did believe that professors of other ethnicities would help but professors and administrators of color would have a vested interest in and an understanding of the cultural capital of the students. Black students claimed that Black faculty and administrators were better equipped to help students with issues that dealt with race because perhaps they themselves had similar experiences addressing some of the issues that they encountered at Lone Star.

Black students claimed that simple things that White students often take for granted are or become daily issues for Blacks. Several students commented that:

Simply finding a barber or someone who does "Black hair" is difficult in this town.

They don't have anyone here for me to address issues with. When I have a question (academic), I need to speak with advisors that are all White. The administration is all White. The professors all White.



I have all White advisors. There is a constant reminder that they control your life. Who is the puppet and who is the puppeteer here?

While Black students remained steadfast in their claims that they do not expect the University to provide them with professors or an administration that cater to Blacks only, neither did they expect segregated services. However, what they do want is representation from administrators of diverse backgrounds and they consider this representation to be paramount to their social well-being. They suggest that it is critical to have this advocacy from people that look like them. They questioned the reason for there not being a critical mass of faculty of color and were perplexed when they could not recall having seen a professor of color.

During one session this researcher was taken by surprise when a White student asked whether there were any Black professors on Lone Star's campus, because he had only taken classes from White males and females. I explained to him that there were fewer than 40 Black faculty members. He pointed out that the University sends out a message that says we (Lone Star) are somehow able to recruit Black football players but we cannot recruit Black professors. We care about our athletic teams being diverse but we (Lone Star) are not equally committed to diverse faculty representation.

Black students felt that establishing fictive kinships with professors on campus was an important part of their growth process. However, most claimed that they found most of their support through friendships, ties with peer group members, and parents.

#### *Peers and Self—Student Responses*

When specifically queried how, why, or if they had changed since arriving at Lone Star, students almost unanimously reflected that the concept of self-help was a developmental task they were mastering. One student describes this experience of self reflection which greatly resembles that of Maslow's self actualization as noted below:

For me it's just like looking in the mirror. In high school you do things and then you come to college and you realize they were not very good things. I quit going to church. When I went to the other school I still did not go and when I came here I started to go again. That was personal from just by looking in the mirror and not liking what I had become but what I was not doing for myself....

"Learning stuff" was also commented upon by several students and generally meant student development and change through interactions with peers and the other education. In fact, it can be inferred from Josh's comment that this "stuff" could quite possibly have some substantial impact on the students college career.

I just wanted a completely different experience than from what I have had my entire life. I wanted to learn stuff.

In addition, peers were noted as being important change agents to the students. They recognized and valued small epiphanies from residence hall living arrangements, group activities, student organization work, structured volunteer and community work. Students often commented that their peers provided significant input into their college as well as home life. Jamie stated,

I've met the best friends that I think I will ever have. They will probably be my friends until I die.

When queried who has helped them change or grow while at Lone Star, one student stated ever so cleverly that he now had 43,000 friends compared to the 5000 that he had in high school and in some instances these peers were quite different from the ones encountered while in high school. Leslie's comment helps to illustrate this point:

I did not always think people were of the same mold, but I always hung out with people from the same mold and now I just hang out with everybody. There is so much to learn from so many different people that my mind is sort of open to that.

It is interesting to note that, although the campus engenders a homogeneous atmosphere, some students not only became more aware of peers from different backgrounds and cultures, but they learned to appreciate and embrace relationships with people different from themselves.

Maybe it's just me because I'm in anthropology, but I have a lot of appreciation for different cultures and I just think of the people I've talked to here, not all of them but a lot of people, are close-minded.

*Black student responses.* Black students commented upon that they obtained most of their support from peer groups or organizational affiliation.

I get most of my support from the organization that I am in. Friends in particular groups.

One student explained that he received support through organizational affiliation and that he was particularly interested in keeping in touch with members and playing an active role because the organization was designed to meet the academic and social needs of Black engineers. The student also noted that he was surprised when he went to a conference hosted by the organization and saw so many Blacks. He felt more comfortable and welcomed at this annual meeting than on campus most of the time.

Several Black students reported that they had gone to high schools that were predominantly Black and that Lone Star was a culture shock. Not only was the institution predominantly White, but it is conservative, traditional, and militaristic—three characteristics that might perhaps not promote a warm and fuzzy institutional climate. One student summed it up by saying that they knew that "it [the University] was White but not this White." However, he was still willing to try and make friends with everyone. He also noted that although he initially was hesitant in becoming friends with Whites, but after three years he has amassed friends of all races.

During one session students discussed whether they thought that White students were open to friendships with Black students. Although they believed that they were initially upon arrival to the University, they were inclined to believe that the University does not engender this support or collegial environment. Again, the notion that the University divides the students through traditions that "do not cater" to Blacks was a sore subject and students also claimed the university recruits a "different type of White person."

Students who attend Lone Star are not representative of all White people. They love this school.

Jessica explained that typically White students who attend Lone Star have not had much experience with Blacks and that she was tired of being the "Black teacher." Several students shared her sentiments and said that they were often the "Black spokesperson" having to explain hair type, why oil was put in their hair, eating habits, and other things that "we know and take for granted about White people."

We don't ask all of those questions because we have to live in their world but they should make some effort to try and understand our culture without just questioning everything.

When this researcher asked if it were possible to learn without questioning Jessica replied that, "Yes, you could live and learn." She explained that the easy thing to do is to question and leave the discussion, but it is more difficult, though perhaps more beneficial, to experience other cultures through meaningful friendships and relationships beyond the classroom.

## SUMMARY

One of the many reasons for using qualitative inquiry is its ability to convey the story through the multiple lenses of the constructivist paradigm. Accordingly, it provides the reader with data collected via various resources. Following a careful review of the reported results, I hope that the reader will find the following highlighted points indicative of a summary of results of this study.

1. Students chose Lone Star for various reasons. Student responses were bifurcated according to ethnicity. Black students were more inclined to choose Lone Star based upon the various financial aid packages that the University offered them, and in some instances, the perceived institutional demographic makeup. White students, on the other hand chose Lone Star based upon legacy and word of mouth. By contrast, none of the Black students spoke of legacy as being a determinant for participation in higher education at Lone Star.
2. According to White students, their parents are very satisfied with the education that Lone Star provides for them. They are equally happy with their students' social integration. They want their students in a safe environment away from people that are too different from them. They help their students during the college choice process in order to enter a conservative and morally sound environment. White parents served as marketing tools for Lone Star; in contrast, Black students commented that their parents had warned them of the prejudicial treatment that they might experience. Several Black students commented that their parents were supportive in light of the financial aid or scholarship packages.
3. Lone Star traditionally attracts a students body that is very homogenous. Students express that a critical mass of minority students, faculty and staff is important for the development and change for both minority students and White students.
4. Two types of relationships were considered important for student growth and development. These were personal and mentoring relationships. Personal relationships included parents and friends. Mentoring relationships were those relationships formed with faculty and staff members at Lone Star University. Mentoring relationships with faculty and staff were perceived as more critical to the academic success and social integration of Black students.
5. Consistent with the literature (Kuh, 1993; Tinto, 1993), in general students who attend Lone Star University considered the "other education" to include school related experiences and events that occur outside of the class-room. However, the "other education" for Black students played a different role and therefore took many different characteristics than those considered by White students. In addition to club and organizational membership they claim that the "other education" included "life lessons" that perhaps Whites students are not traditionally confronted with. According to Black students the "other education" also included what they termed as survival skills needed in the "White world" and Lone Star provided them with multiple opportunities to develop these skills. More specifically, students spoke of the ability to develop a "thick skin" and to develop better coping strategies to combat the overt and covert forms of racism that they were confronted with while on and off campus. They explained that they also learned how to ignore comments and images that were derogatory in nature, and to "play the game" as a form of manipulation of a system which they believed does not serve as an ally.
6. This study also suggests that Lone Star traditions are not inclusive of marginalized groups such as ethnic minorities (and women). Black students commented that significant efforts had to be made on their part to join in traditions and to understand them. White students and their parents are very pleased with the traditions at Lone Star and think it important for all students' social development while in college. However, this research does not

suggest that current practices are exclusive by administrative design. It does imply that these traditions may be attractive to certain student groups. This research does indicate that since most traditions were started during a time when there were no minority students or women that attended the university; this artifact remains influential in current events and celebrations.

7. Black students experience overt and covert racism frequently. According to this study, several factors might exacerbate this phenomenon. For instance, although it is this researcher's belief that the University does so unknowingly in some instances, they continue to send out highly politicized yet subtle messages to students and the general public through; the location of offices to aid minority students, political stances regarding admissions and offices that once served minority students, and relegating Blacks and other ethnic minorities to low-paying positions on campus.

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